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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
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http://www.icwhen.com

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A-ONE #0101 03/05/99

~ AOL/Netscape Deal OK ~ Pyramid Scams Abound! ~ People Are Talking
~ Notebook Torture Tests ~ New Monopoly $$ Token ~ Internet Explorer 5
~ Online Services Where? ~ Windows '98, Part 2? ~ Pentium III Xeon
~ DB & Edge Source Sold ~ Apple Source Available ~ Notebooks Torture!

-* Couple Challenges Amazon *-
-* FCC Says NO Internet Regulations *-
-* Microsoft to Unveil Reorganization Plans *-

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Wow! Talk about Mother Nature taking winter out with a bang! We got hit with two good-sized storms in the past week although they didn't live up to

the media-hyped Nor'easter category. And, after this most recent one at the beginning of the week, the mercury climbed to the 50's at mid-week! Typical New England weather. Hopefully, Spring is around the corner! By the way, a belated happy St. Patrick's Day to all of you celebrating "wearin' of the green".

Just a heads-up as to what we're working on for 'major' projects here at A-ONE in the coming weeks, since people are asking for a number of specific items:

Worldwide Atari dealer and vendor listing
Atari user group listings
Calendar/announcements (user group meetings, shows, events, etc.)
Atari developers and product announcements
And others I can't think of at the moment

The most significant task that we'll be undertaking is a complete database of all commercial Atari software, with the latest versions. This project will be led by our own "CC: Classic Chips" columnist Albert Dayes. Although I haven't discussed this project in-depth with Albert yet (we're in the planning stage discussion mode at the moment), this will likely be a culmination of non-games software. We're hoping that the database will eventually be formatted in two ways: text and a database format which will be compatible to programs such as AtariWorks, and able to be imported to PC programs such as Excel.

If you have any information, announcements, and the like that fit into the above categories, please pass them along to us in order that we can include them in our final compilations. Also, feel free to broadcast this request to any online or printed publication you feel would be interested. Dealers and developers, please pass along any pertinent information regarding your company to us; there's certainly nothing wrong with a little free advertising!

Meanwhile, it's business as usual here at A-ONE! The feedback continues to be extremely favorable. Our e-mail subscription list continues to grow on a daily basis, as well. I have to tell you - we appreciate the continued support. It makes it all worthwhile and gives us a reason to grow and improve.

I just wanted to pass along a "Get Well Soon" message to A-ONE's Unabashed Atariophile, Michael Burkley. Michael has been laid-up with the flu these past few weeks and hasn't been able to do much of anything, much less work on his column.

Until next time...

Delphi's Greg Evans Posts About Diamond Back & Edge:

Hi guys!

Just read in Atari Computing #12 that Michael White has purchased the source code for Diamond Back and Edge and is planning to upgrade them. A new DB is in the works first with the following additions:

Minix and VFAT support.
Better tape backup support.

TAR format tapes.
CD Rom support (maybe).

He'd like to hear about any bugs in the current version so he can fix them also. His email address is michael@fastlane.net.

Greg

New Location For Silly Software Site
From: Deano <deano@zetnet.co.uk>

Please note that the new url for the Silly Software Site is http://www.sillysoftware.freeserve.co.uk/index.html

The Grafix Web Site is now on line. Please go to it and check it. If you discover a problem please report it to me along with what browser you are using plus the colour/resolution you are viewing in.

The url for that is:
http://www.sillysoftware.freeserve.co.uk/grafix/Menu.htm

Other than that...other comments on it would be nice.

Deano
Deano@zetnet.co.uk
http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/sillysoftware/index.html

A Note from The Computer Dungeon
From: ComDungeon <comdungeon@aol.com>

Hello to all...

I must apologize to several people who have recently called and left messages on our voice mail for not returning your phone calls yet.

Unfortunately, I am currently working 12 hour to 14 hour days at my full time job and the hours I am at home have not left me a decent hour to return anyone's phone calls (I don't think anyone, no matter how devoted an Atari user wants a 2 am phone call about software).

Not sure how long my current extended work hours will continue. But for the present time, if you are interested in ordering any products that we have listed on our website, please send your inquires via Email to "ComDungeon@aol.com". I continue to read and respond to all Email inquires on a daily basis and have been able to ship all Email orders within 24 hrs of my receiving payment.

Again, I apologize to those who have telephoned us and haven't had their phone calls returned. This is not the normal way that The Computer Dungeon does business.

As soon as my work schedule returns to more "normal" hours, I will post to this newsgroup that I'll be available for telephone orders.

Thanks for your patience and understanding.

Al Horton
The Computer Dungeon
To visit our website, please point your browser to:
http://www.cyberspy.com/~cdungeon/dungeon.htm
<A HREF=http://www.cyberspy.com/~cdungeon/dungeon.htm> Computer Dungeon </A>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Yep, it’s that time again. Time to peruse the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet. But before we begin, I’d like to relate one of my recent experiences to you.

I don’t remember if I mentioned here that I recently discontinued my CompuServe account because the last forum I had any use for (The Computer Club Forum) had made the switch from ASCII access to HMI access exclusively. You’ve seen the message from the Forum Sysop here in these pages (in our premier issue, I think) so you know that the Forum had two choices in the matter: Either convert to HMI-only, or be shut down. Given those options, I probably would have made the same choice as the Sysops made. But the fact is that I’m not in their place. I do have other options, and I have no desire to continue paying $25.00 per month for what amounts to nothing more than an email account at this point.

So, after almost twelve years I accessed what was just about the only option on CompuServe that I had never used before: The "Discontinue My Membership" option. It was done and over with in less that 48 hours. After using the online option to close my CIS account, I was given an 800 number to call. When I called the number, a very nice woman (CIS has always had the highest caliber employees, in my opinion) took the pertinent information and asked why I was discontinuing my membership.

I explained to her that I could no longer access the things I wanted to on CompuServe because the big-wigs had decided to dump ASCII in favor of HMI. She was quick to point out that there were several programs available which would allow a Mac or PC user to make use of HMI. I thanked her for the information but told her that I used neither PC nor Mac and since CompuServe has consistently refused to release the documentation and libraries for HMI, I had no hope of ever using my computer to access these forums. She was a bit confused by all of this but took me at my word, and even mentioned that it was a shame to loose such a long term member as myself (I joined CompuServe on April 27, 1987... she looked it up for me). She said that the cancellation would take place within 48 hours and that they would hold email for me in case I decided to reactivate my account.

A day and a half later my account was deactivated and that was that...

Or so I thought.

Two days after the account was officially closed, I received a phone call from CIS support. The gentleman wanted to know why I had cancelled my account. He asked not in a pushy, obnoxious way, but in a very courteous way. I again explained my reasons. His tone seemed to change quickly as I laid out my reason, and he courteously wished me well.

Approximately ten days after the account was deactivated I received another call from CIS Support. A different person, but still very polite and courteous.

"What can we do to get you back as a subscriber?" he asked.

"Either reinstate ASCII access to forums or provide the docs and libraries for HMI" was my answer.

He too was confused by this, and asked why I didn't simply use one of the available programs. Again I explained that I used neither PC nor Mac and that CIS held the secrets of HIM closer to the vest than a royal flush. Again I experienced the change in attitude. It didn't strike me until later, but the attitude change was almost exactly the same as the first time I had seen it.

Could it be that CIS employees are told to just write off anyone who won't 'get with the program' and get a PC or Mac? I highly doubt it.

In the first place, none of the people I talked to from CompuServe during this experience seemed the type to just write anyone off. Second of all, I think that it was just the shock of someone actually using a "classic" computer to access CompuServe in this age of cutting edge techno-toys. I'll bet that they would have been shocked to find out that there are (or were up until recently) folks accessing CompuServe with their tried and true Commodore 64s or Coleco ADAMs. I can understand the mindset, but I feel strongly that we need to fight against it... to 'Fight the Future', as it were (Kudos to you if you caught that reference).

You might expect me to be bitter about having to leave CompuServe after so many years, but I'm not. I'm quite disappointed, but I understand their reasons. It helps a lot that I've been a part of Delphi's Atari Advantage Forum for almost as long as I've been on CompuServe, and that the folks there are great.

It helps even more that Delphi hasn't been shortsighted. They've taken care to provide ASCII access for those of us who still wanted it while advancing the state of the art in online services. You can have your cake and eat it too with ASCII access or access via the world wide web. The choice is yours... as it should be.

Well, let's take a look at what's being said on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Jin Kazama asks:

"Has anyone out there has used any of the Atari emulators that are available on the PC right now? I have been a long time Atari owner (back to my 800XL), and unfortunately my STFM gave up the ghost some time ago,

but I still have the machine and software on floppy - and as I'll be getting a PII 366 soon for my course, I'd love to be able to run all my old software again,, especially GFA Basic 3. Cheers for any help/advice you can give!"

John Logan tells Jin:

"I have tried gemulator 4.8 on a celeron at work. I couldn't get it to print from Papyrus and Diamond Back had some difficulty. [I] Can't help with GFA Basic."

Kenneth Medin adds:

"GFA 3.6 works very well with the Gemulator demo. Nice to get a screen of 1027*768 mono."

John Whalley tells Jin:

"MagiC-PC is very usable with apps such as papyrus and Calamus. I have no experience of GFA, though I seem to remember reading of problems with it under Atari MagiC so I'd be a little suspicious of it under MagiC-PC. That said, the version I'm using is v1.2 (=Atari v5.11), and the new MagiC6 is supposed to be a vast improvement."

Oliver Schildmann adds:

"The problems are the same on every MagiC version on every system (and can also occur with MultiTOS).

The interpreter works fine (as long as you can say that about GfA ;->) as a SingleTask, but the compiler needs a patch (there are different ones, i.e GFA-Patch, which also exists in an English version), because it has a nasty fault on its memory allocation.

MagiC 6.0 offers general improvements, but the now released 6.1 is said to be 2 to 3 times as fast as the 6.0 (just waiting for the update at the moment).

It does a sort of "on the fly precompiling" the 68000 code for much faster emulation."

James Gallagher posts:

"My Atari is sitting idle in the house at the moment but having seen these Atari groups still going strong I'm looking to get back into Atari hardware. Does anyone have a list of people selling various pieces of Hardware ... I fancy getting a Falcon sometime!"

Nicholas Bales tells James:

"In the UK, the main players are Titan, Systems Solutions and TUS. Go here for links:

ari_dealers.html"http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Bay/8745/at

Chris Crosskey adds:

"Abingdon Synthesis Projects also supports Atari stuff....If you're serious about a Falcon I can probably source one for you. Most of what I

do is to replace dying bits of Atari hardware with stuff to allow you to use off-the-shelf PC kit like mice, hard-drives, CDROM's etc...."

Brian Roland asks for help with the latest version of MagiC:

"I just got MagiC and installed it... It has the wrong keyboard layout! How do I fix this? I need the standard US layout...

Currently, the @ sign is where " should be, I get a # for backslash (can't find a backslash at all), I get a for number...

Well, you get the picture...it's all mangled up. What do I do?"

Bengy Collins tells Brian:

"Well this is the most asked MagiC question of all time. There are many patches available for this, unfortunately my download bay is down right now but you can get one at Baldricks homepage:
http://www.netset.com/~baldrick/products.html"

Philip Taylor posts this interesting bit of info on the Y2K bug as it relates to the ST(E):

"TOS 2.06 and Y2K
The ST(E) Millennium Bug

Gemdos stores the date in one word, with bits 9-15 being the year minus 1980. Hence the year 1990 is stored as 10, 1999 as 19, and 2000 as 20 etc. With 7 bits any number up to 127 can be stored, corresponding to 2107. (Gemdos may limit this to 119 ?).

The Gemdos functions tgetdate ($2A) and tsetdate ($2B) invoke the lower-level Xbios routines Gettime (23) and Settime (22). These routines read the date/time from, and send it to, the Intelligent Keyboard Controller or IKC. [This is a big 20-pin chip on the underside of the keyboard]. The IKC contains the "real-time" clock. Now, data are transmitted to and from the IKC in packed BCD format: each byte containing two decimal digits. One byte is allocated to the year, hence a two-decimal digit year is stored and processed in the IKC.

For the year 1999, stored by GEMDOS in memory as 19 (25 hex), one might expect that the value 19 BCD would be the byte written to/read from the IKC by Settime and Gettime.

But no, these routines add/subtract an offset of 80 decimal. Thus for the year 1999, Settime gets the value 19 from tsetdate (or by direct Xbios function call), adds 80 to produce 99, and sends 99 as a 2-digit BCD to the IKC. Conversely, Gettime gets the BCD number 99 from the IKC, subtracts 80 from it, then packs 19 into the prescribed DOS format.

So what about year 2000? This is stored by Gemdos as 20 (well within its capable range), but Settime changes this to 100 and then of course fails to encode this as a two-digit BCD. [In fact Settime sends illegal nibbles to the IKC, which are ignored].

As far as I know, Settime and Gettime are the only routines used for communicating with the RTC in the IKC. So it does not matter if the IKC stores the year 19 or 99, so long as Settime and Gettime agree to add/remove the same offset. I suggest zero offset. To stop Settime

adding 80 to the year, the patch for TOS 2.06 UK (and probably German version too) is:

1F43 $80 change to $00

and to stop Gettime subtracting 80 from the year: 1E91 $50 change to $00

For other versions of TOS, look for strings beginning with $80123c001b... and $501400e982...

With these changes, TOS can handle dates up to 2079. For example, using Control Panel to enter the year 15, Gemdos interprets this to be 2015, subtracts 1980 giving 35, passes this value to modified Settime, which now stores 35 BCD correctly in the IKC.

In a date-sorted window, files of the year 00 are correctly shown as later than those of 99.

OK, all ready for the next century now...

Acknowledgements

Most of the above information is taken from "Atari ST Internals", Abacus Software 1988.

The patches have been tested using the TOS RAM Loader program from Pera Putnik"

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what the are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - "Ape Escape"!! Wrestling Galore!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" New "Grand Theft Auto"!! "Big Air"!
  New ’Monopoly’ Token Announced!
  And much more!

->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

MacWEEK.com Gets Inside Story on Connectix VGS for Windows

Controversial Emulator of Sony PlayStation Games Currently Available for Macs Only

Last week MacWEEK.com reported that San Mateo-based Connectix Corp. is continuing to develop a Windows version of Virtual Game Station despite a

temporary restraining order granted Thursday to Sony Computer Entertainment Inc., maker of the Sony PlayStation.

The current version of the $50 software emulator is available only for the Macintosh.

Connectix CEO Roy McDonald told MacWEEK.com that Sony had demanded that Connectix suspend all development of a forthcoming Windows version of the PlayStation emulator. Foster City, Calif.-based Sony also asked that Connectix hand over all work in progress on the project and that it cancel all future work on the Windows version.

‘‘Connectix’s development of Virtual Game Station for Windows is a big deal," says Matthew Rothenberg, director of editorial content for MacWEEK.com. ‘‘The Mac version has been well received by Mac users everywhere, so the prospect of a Windows counterpart is equally exciting for the wider PC market."

Voters Elect ’Sack of Money’ as New Monopoly(R) Game Piece

Hasbro, Inc. today announced the official results of a campaign to elect a new Monopoly game token. The sack of money, the ultimate status symbol, made financial history today by besting fellow candidates the piggybank and the bi-plane to become the first new token to be added to the Monopoly game in more than 40 years.

The sack of money, introduced today at the Museum of American Financial History in New York City, will be on exhibit as part of the Museum’s permanent collection of financial artifacts and memorabilia. The new token, which can also be seen on-line at www.monopoly.com, will be available in games being shipped this month.

As part of the Monopoly Game Token Campaign, voters also selected the racecar as their favorite existing token, which was announced in October. With the addition of the sack of money, there are now 11 tokens included in the classic Monopoly game including the battleship, cannon, dog, horse & rider, iron, racecar, shoe, thimble, top hat and wheelbarrow. The last new tokens added to the Monopoly game (the dog, wheelbarrow and horse & rider) were introduced in the early 1950s.

‘‘We are thrilled with the enthusiastic response to this historic election," says Glenn Kilbride, vice president of U.S. Marketing for Hasbro Games. ‘‘People have a real affinity for the Monopoly tokens and they identify with being the dog, the racecar, the battleship. Everyone has a favorite token and it looks like the sack of money will start a brand new favorite token tradition with a broad fan base."

Nearly 1.5 million votes were cast for the three token candidates at the Monopoly game Web site, the Monopoly toll-free hotline and at F.A.O. Schwarz stores nationwide over a three-month period. The sack of money cashed in as the winner with 51 percent of the vote. The runner-up race was a close one in which the high-flying bi-plane landed second place with 29 percent of the vote, slightly edging out the piggybank which placed third with 20 percent.

Monopoly game fans are encouraged to visit the re-designed Monopoly game Web site at www.monopoly.com to view the new token and to click and collect

the sack of money and other favorite Monopoly game tokens. Hasbro has joined with thingworld.com, one of today's hottest internet multimedia companies, to allow viewers to collect animated token ''things," which can be saved on a desktop and made into interactive screensavers.

Since 1935, the Monopoly game has developed a following second-to-none. More than 200 million copies have been sold worldwide and more than 500 million people have played the classic game. The Monopoly game is sold in 80 countries and is translated into 26 languages. To learn more about the Monopoly game including game tips and tricks and tournament information go directly to the Monopoly game site on the World Wide Web located at http://www.monopoly.com.

"Ape Escape" Pushes Boundaries of PlayStation

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced today the summer release of "Ape Escape"(TM), a ground-breaking new character-based action/adventure title, available exclusively for the PlayStation(R) game console.

Developed by Sony Computer Entertainment, Inc., "Ape Escape" is the first game to take full advantage of the capabilities of the Dual Shock(TM) Analog Controller.

"Ape Escape" leads players into a new territory in 3D platform gaming. Gamers must test their dexterity by using both controller sticks to simultaneously maneuver through the game and control their gadgets and vehicles, toggling back and forth between their inventory by using the square, triangle, circle and "x" buttons.

Players must rely on their skills and intuition to control movement and activate an arsenal of unique gadgets including a Stun Club, Time Net, Sky Flyer (propeller), Slingback Shooter (slingshot), Super Hoop (hula hoop-style gadget), Monkey Radar, a Remote Control Car and Water Net, all while enjoying fast-paced, innovative gameplay and exploring massive 3D environments.

Other key game features include:

-- Vehicles including a tank and a row boat (players must maneuver vehicles using both sticks of the Dual Shock Analog Controller)
-- Mini bonus games that unfold throughout gameplay
-- A total of 25 levels spanning eight unique worlds
-- Training rooms to learn how to use each unique gadget.

"PlayStation is renowned for offering consumers the most original and advanced gameplay experience in videogame entertainment. In Ape Escape, players are challenged to use both controller sticks to guide an array of gadgets separately from controlling the character," said Ami Blaire, director, marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "Consumers will undoubtedly be drawn to 'Ape Escape' because it brings a fresh new element to the PlayStation gaming experience -- going where no game has gone before."

In the game, Specter and his band of apes have invaded the professor's laboratory at the zoo, stolen intelligence-enhancing helmets and activated the time machine to transport themselves back in time in an attempt to make monkeys the new rulers of the world. Spike, a fearless young boy,

arrives at the lab with his friend, Jake, just as Specter and his monkey minions are being transported back in time. Now it is up to Spike to capture all of the monkeys and save the world.

Accolade Ships Big Air for the PlayStation Game Console

Snowboarding Game Includes Professional Snowboarders, Licensed Boards and Gear, and Cool Soundtrack

Accolade, a leading publisher and developer of video game software, announced today that its Big Air(TM) snowboarding game begins shipping this week for the Playstation game console.

‘‘Big Air possesses the true feel and look of snowboarding," said Monte Singman, executive producer of Big Air. ‘‘The eye-popping gameplay along with great licensed boards, gear, pro snowboarders, and music really lets gamers partake in a genuine snowboarding experience."

Six professional snowboarders in Big Air appear as ‘‘boss" characters, including World Boardercross Champion Shaun Palmer, Nike Big Air champion and Burton team rider Mike Beallo, 1998’s Playboy Halfpipe champion Ian Spiro, Nitro International team rider Nicola Thost, Nitro Pro team rider Fabien Rohrer, and ESPN Winter X Games champion and Olympic Bronze medal winner Ross Powers.

Big Air allows players to participate in Halfpipe, Big Air, Boardercross, Slalom or Freeride competitions on 30 unique courses in any of six countries. Courses are featured in France, Japan, Scotland, Switzerland, United States, and Germany. As players win competitions, they gain points and are awarded the opportunity to ‘‘travel" to other countries and compete in advanced snowboarding contests.

Big Air features more than 80 real snowboards from such manufacturers as Palmer, Ride, Morrow, Joyride, Arbor, Maui and Sons International, Burton, K2, and Nitro. Clothing from such manufactures as Wave Rave, Westbeach, Quiksilver, Sessions, K2, Ride, Maui and Sons International and Burton is also included in Big Air.

The Big Air soundtrack includes more than 25 songs and features gold-selling MCA recording artist, Blink 182, with two songs on the game’s soundtrack Dammit and Untitled. In addition to Blink 182, nine other bands appear on the Big Air soundtrack.

The game offers intense mulitplayer action via horizontal or vertical split screen and supports PlayStation analog and Dual Shock controllers. Big Air is currently available for $39.95. For more information on the game please visit the Big Air web site at www.bigair.com.

Take a Ride on the Wild Side with Midway’s ’California Speed’

Jump into the driver’s seat and strap in for a wild ride through the California coast at speeds over 160 mph with California Speed(tm).

Midway Home Entertainment Inc., a leading video game developer, today

announced that it is shipping California Speed for Nintendo(R) 64 to retail outlets nationwide and is due in to retail outlets later this week. Due to initial retail sell-in having already exceeded expectations, allocation of initial shipments to retailers was necessary. Midway promptly placed a reorder with Nintendo to ensure that it has enough cartridges to fulfill orders.

"Due to the overwhelming demand for California Speed from retailers nationwide, Midway is pleased to report that it has already begun a second production run," said Paula Cook, director of marketing at Midway Home Entertainment. "With its success in the arcades, Midway couldn't pass up the opportunity to build the franchise by extending it to our Nintendo 64 customers, and the retailers have reinforced that decision with their initial order numbers."

As a special addition to the launch of California Speed for the Nintendo 64, Midway is also holding a special go-kart giveaway promotion with GamePro(R) Magazine that will run from March 15 to April 30. Valued at $3000, additional details can be found at GamePro's Web site, www.gamepro.com/californiaspeed.

California Speed, developed by the coin-op legends at Atari Games, has no speed traps to slow you down and a bevy of beautiful girls at the finish line. Race through the lush greenery of Yosemite National Park, the open plains of the Mojave Desert, the twisting tracks of the Santa Cruz roller coaster or the winding cliffside roads of Highway 1. California Speed's 16 tracks, including multiple hidden tracks, and furious action will electrify gamers of all ages.

Players can race a wide selection of high performance cars and fantasy vehicles including convertibles, F1-type racers, trucks and even a golf cart! Customize your speedy machine with new rims, a wild paint job and choice of transmission, and get on the road. California Speed is packed with bonus features like a mirror track mode, shortcuts, 'hidden' vehicles and a special series mode -- not to mention the three gorgeous California babes waiting at the finish line -- to give gamers an extra added incentive to master the game's many white-knuckle tracks.

PlayStation Solidifies Its Role as the RPG Platform of Choice With the Release of Legend of Legaia

The First Highly-Anticipated RPG of the Year Hits Store Shelves

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced today the release of Legend of Legaia, an innovative role-playing game (RPG) available exclusively for the PlayStation game console.

Developed by Contrail (a Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. group company) and produced by Prokion, Legend of Legaia reinvents the traditional RPG gaming experience with its innovative fighting system, captivating storyline and explorative 3D world.

Legend of Legaia features an original combat system, called the ''Tactical Arts System," that allows players to enjoy a highly tactical battle with the look and feel of a real fighting game. Key battle system features include:

-- Full-sized polygon-based characters that throw punches and kicks that land realistically on the enemy
-- Special combinations and attacks to be discovered for more effective and spectacular fighting
-- 3D environments with dynamic camera angles
-- Hundreds of 3D enemies that react and attack
-- 3D magic effects, armor and weapon graphics that are visible in combat mode
-- Dual Shock Analog Controller feedback where vibrations register the true intensity of every hit.

‘‘Both hardcore RPG enthusiasts and more mainstream gamers will be challenged by Legend of Legaia’s exciting and innovative gameplay," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. ‘‘From the unique fighting system to the explorative 3D world, Legend of Legaia further enhances the PlayStation gaming experience."

Legend of Legaia also offers complete 3D polygonal graphics with 3D towns and dungeons, unique traps, screens that scroll in all directions and various structures, providing an action-packed adventure for each player.

The adventure is based on the main character Vahn, as he tries to save the world of Legaia from the strange mist which has blanketed the once rich and prosperous land. The mist has brought madness, rage, and death to whatever it has touched and continues to spread. Vahn is on a quest to revive seven Genesis Trees which, when brought back to life, completely disperse the deadly mist from the area surrounding it. On his journey he will meet comrades Noa and Gala, and together they will fight for the survival of Legaia.

‘‘Legend of Legaia is a strong addition to our growing list of RPG titles," added Blaire. ‘‘With games like Final Fantasy VII, SaGa Frontier and Wild Arms already available in our incredible library, PlayStation has established itself as the platform of choice for marquee role-playing games."

Psygnosis Readies First DVD-Based Game

The Game Developer’s Conference in San Jose, Calif., next week will be the setting for Psygnosis to show off one of the first games to take advantage of the new capabilities of DVD technology.

Called Lander, the game is a futuristic flying/shooting game in which the player is sent on missions to retrieve items, while at the same time fighting off enemy attack. The game has simulated environments that include ice, fire and lava, water, cities, fortifications, jungles, caves, tunnels, slime, deserts, sandstorms, and fog.

Because DVD has 4.7 gigabytes of capacity -- seven times the capacity of a 650-megabyte CD-ROM disc -- there is more room for rich full-motion graphics and digital sound without stopping in the middle of play to change discs.

"[DVD] brings the world of digital-quality home cinema to a computer game." -- Dominic Mallinson Psygnosis Lander uses MPEG-2 full-motion video sequences and Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound. Dolby Digital 5.1 uses six speakers -- left front and back, right front and back, center, and

subwoofer -- for full surround sound. This will give Lander a movie-like sound quality, according to Dominic Mallinson, Technical Director for Psygnosis. Most games use two speakers, or two plus a subwoofer.

"[DVD] brings the world of digital-quality home cinema to a computer game," he said. "In the past, video in games has always been a compromise in quality of frame rate or audio. With DVD, there is no compromise."

Psygnosis is also taking advantage of the multiple-angle feature in DVD, which lets the viewer watch the same scene from different angles. This will be used in watching movie sequences, which are shown in between missions.

Since this was Psygnosis' first DVD title, the company had some learning to do. "There is always a learning curve when using a technology for the first time," said Mallinson. "Lander DVD did take longer than a straight CD version but we learned a lot, which will benefit future DVD titles."

Mallinson admits the market for a game like this is still in its infancy, since DVD drives and a fancy six-speaker set-up are not cheap. It costs around $300 for the DVD drive and an MPEG-2 decoder, plus $200 for the six-speaker set-up.

"We've always prided ourselves as being at the forefront of new technology markets and to an extent, we are helping to pave the way for others," he said. For starters, the PlayStation II will have a DVD drive, which makes it a natural platform for the game, he said.

Using DVD has to have a reason behind it, or a purpose to the game, not just because it's there, said Jeremy Schwartz, senior analyst with Forrester Research. Right now, most game companies are waiting for that purpose, and for a market.

"All of the big game publishers have been biding their time, watching what happens with DVD as a medium from a market acceptance point of view," he said.

"Most are in a watch and wait stance. They want to make sure the technology has a big enough market presence to justify doing that." When there's a big enough market penetration, then they'll probably produce DVD content, he added.

Lander will be available by the end of the month.

Gathering of Developers Urges Drivers to Get on Track

Mission Pack to Include Original Grand Theft Auto Game for Free

Yeah baby, its shagadelic! Developer-driven computer and video game publishing company Gathering of Developers announced today it will publish the Grand Theft Auto: London 1969 mission pack for the PC.

The mission pack will include a free original version of the hugely popular Grand Theft Auto chase game, which has sold more than 1.6 million copies on PC and PlayStation worldwide. The mission pack features all of Grand Theft Auto's great gameplay souped-up with groovy attitude, hip music and tongue-in-cheek action set in London in the late 60's. Developed

by Rockstar Games, the PC game will cruise into stores nationwide in spring 1999 for $29.95. The Gathering acquired the Grand Theft Auto: London 1969 rights through its partnership with Take Two Interactive's Rockstar Games, a high-end video game publisher.

"Grand Theft Auto was a huge success because it went beyond the conventional driving game by combining attitude and racy fun with great gameplay," said Harry Miller, co-founder and president of Gathering of Developers. "Grand Theft Auto: London 1969 will once again get players addicted to this game of chase and debauchery."

"Ever since working on the original Grand Theft Auto I've wanted to create a version set in London," said Sam Houser, president of Rockstar Games. "London in the sixties was slick, glamorous and cool but with an ever-present undercurrent of ultra-violence. With Grand Theft Auto: London 1969 we're going let the rest of the world enjoy this era."

Set in the late 60's, Grand Theft Auto: London 1969 focuses on one of the coolest periods in the London underworld and parodies the cult TV and movies of the time. Sporting more than 30 new multi-stage missions, new characters and maps, a massive garage of 30 classic cars, and an incredible 60 minute period soundtrack featuring Ska and booty shaking music, Grand Theft Auto: London 1969 also introduces players to all the beatniks, famous faces, themes, hippies, and criminals of 1960s British life.

From the filth of the East End and the grand Georgian houses of Chelsea, to the murky Thames riverside and the West End landmarks, drivers will speed through London to complete their missions. Each mission requires the player to commit any number of wicked acts such as stealing cars, kidnapping, and fencing stolen goods in order to satisfy his master's increasingly bizarre desires. As players progress they are drawn further into a nightmare criminal underworld filled with theft, killing, drugs, extortion and prostitution.

Smash Up Cars and Compete in Wild Driving Action

Accolade, a leading publisher and developer of video game software, announced today a new action racing game, Demolition Racer(TM). The game lets players participate in fast action demolition derby races with 16 cars on 12 tracks. Demolition Racer will be available for the PlayStation(R) game console and personal computers in the fall of this year.

"Demolition Racer is packed with intense racing, amazing crashes and pure destruction; it's sure to please fans of demolition racing games," said Chris Downend, executive producer of Demolition Racer. "The team has the experience in this genre to create a truly exciting game."

Demolition Racer is being developed by The Pitbull Syndicate, and includes some of the core team members who created the highly successful Destruction Derby(R) 1 and 2 games.

The game allows players to choose from eight different car types and compete in several types of demolition derby events, such as demolition racing, bowl matches, stock car racing, last man standing, and suicide racing. After collisions, vehicles will suffer from performance

degradation and will visibly show damage as hoods, tires, doors and other automobile parts fly off cars. A variety of driving conditions will be present in Demolition Racer, including mud and night driving. Gameplay will also include huge jumps that send cars into 360-degree mid-air corkscrews. Demolition Racer features incredible speed and collisions at 30 frames per second.

The Demolition Racer soundtrack is a mix of hardcore industrial rock and techno music and will include original music by Roadrunner Records recording artist Fear Factory and XL Recording artist Empirion. Tommy Tallarico, known for his role in creating much of the music in today's video games, will produce the soundtrack along with Sound Engineer David Tickle. Tickle is best known for his work with The Beatles, U2, Peter Gabriel and Prince.

Demolition Racer will feature a new game engine and offers intense mulitplayer action via horizontal or vertical split screen. The game will support PlayStation analog and Dual Shock(R) controllers.

Acclaim Sports Readies WWF Attitude to Enter the Squared Circle this May!

More Superstars, New Features, Distinguish Smash Follow-up to WWF War Zone!

Acclaim Entertainment, Inc., a leading worldwide interactive entertainment company, today announced that WWF Attitude(TM) for PlayStation is scheduled to ship this May, while the Nintendo 64 version is scheduled to ship in June. WWF Attitude will star over 40 WWF superstars in incredible no-holds-barred sports-entertainment action and has a host of exciting new features.

''WWF War Zone was the high water mark for wrestling video games in 1998," said Michael Jerchower, sports product manager. ''Gamer response was fantastic and it was one of the top-selling console games for the year. With WWF Attitude we are poised to surpass War Zone in both game play and features."

Developed by Acclaim Studios' Iguana West, creators of NBA Jam '99, Turok 2: Seeds of Evil(PC version), as well as many of Acclaim's previous best-selling WWF video games, WWF Attitude captures all of the attitude and high energy entertainment that is the WWF. WWF Attitude features include:

-- Over 40 of your favorite WWF Superstars like The Rock, Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Undertaker, and D-Generation X!

-- First ever ''Create Your Own Pay Per View Mode": Allows you to select 8 wrestler matches, Title Belts on the line, Specialty Matches and Authentic WWF Special Events.

-- Over 20 Game modes including all-new Specialty Matches: LumberJack, Survivor Series, Triple Threat, and King of the Ring.

-- All-New Match Options including First Blood, I Quit, 2 out of 3 falls, Iron Man, Tornado, Hard Core, Last Man Standing, Steel Cage and Weapons.

-- Wrestle as an individual or tag team and work your way to the title in Career mode including a full WWF season from House shows to TV shows such as Monday Night Raw and Sunday Night Heat to the ultimate Pay Per View Event; Wrestlemania! (1-4 players)

-- All-New Create-a-Wrestler Options -Customize your wrestler’s move sets by selecting moves from your favorite superstars. Create your own costume including custom text on T-Shirts, Jackets and more. All-New facial characteristics. Custom theme songs.

-- 7 Title Belts on the line including European, Intercontinental, Tag Team, World Heavyweight, Hard Core, Light Heavyweight, and Woman’s Belt.

-- All-New Authentic WWF Entrances featuring individual special effects and music!

-- Three All-New Arena Environments: House Show, Raw, and Pay Per View!

-- Wrestle in the aisle!

-- Photo realistic polygonal wrestlers with real-life faces and 3-D environments

-- All-new motion captured maneuvers by the premiere wrestlers in the WWF

-- Over 400 moves including signature moves for each wrestler

-- Trademark finishing moves and taunts unique to each wrestler

-- 2 man commentary featuring Shane McMahon and Jerry ‘‘The King" Lawler at ringside

-- Training mode: Allows you to practice maneuvers before you take on your opponent

-- Surprise your opponents with all-new weapons (and some old favorites) including Vince McMahon’s bedpan, Baseball Bat, Shovel, TV monitor and more!

-- Special Cheats and Codes

‘‘For WWF Attitude we took every step to exceed the outstanding gameplay and graphics we established in War Zone," said Mike Archer, Acclaim producer. ‘‘We’re pushing the wrestling genre to a new level, plus we’re going to introduce a few things that have never been seen before in a wrestling game."

The marketing campaign for WWF Attitude calls for national TV advertising starring the top Superstars in the WWF, nationwide print in major video game and wrestling publications, extensive online marketing including a dedicated Attitude site the acclaim.net website and banner advertising, consumer promotions with strategically targeted partners, and WWF Attitude covers on several major consumer gaming publications.

Acclaim’s World Wrestling Federation license will not be renewed after it’s expiration on November 15, 1999. Acclaim’s proprietary wrestling game engine will be utilized for a wrestling title in the year 2000 and additional wrestling games to be announced.

Electronic Arts to Release WCW Mayhem for Both the PlayStation and N64

First Highly Anticipated World Championship Wrestling Title From Industry Leader EA Pulls Out All Stops to Deliver a Unique, Action-Packed "Out of Hand, Out of the Ring" Game Experience

Electronic Arts(TM), the world's largest interactive entertainment software company, today announced the name and development of its upcoming wrestling title.

WCW Mayhem will be the first title from Electronic Arts (EA) since the company signed an exclusive long term partnership for interactive entertainment game titles with the World Championship Wrestling Inc. (WCW), providers of power-packed family sports entertainment. The game will be available for both Playstation and Nintendo 64 console systems this fall.

''We are very excited to be working with the WCW to produce fresh and innovative wrestling titles," said Steve Rechtschaffner, executive producer at Electronic Arts. ''Our goal is to bring the best sports entertainment for audiences of all types to enjoy. Having the exclusive WCW license coupled with a highly talented development team will no doubt help ensure that EA will be a major force in the wrestling game genre, just as we are in the other categories."

WCW Mayhem will offer gameplayer a fast, action and power-packed wrestling experience equal to that of the WCW house matches and the widely popular televised events broadcast in over 50 countries worldwide through the TNT television network. With more than 60 WCW celebrity wrestlers featured in the game, players will be able to pull the same signature moves and stunts of their favorite WCW wrestler. These include ''Hollywood" Hulk Hogan, Goldberg, Kevin ''Big Sexy" Nash, Diamond Dallas Page and Sting, to name a few.

Staying true to its name, WCW Mayhem will elevate the wrestling gaming experience to an intense, power-packed level by offering a unique ''out of hand, out of the ring" feature in which fans can break all the wrestling rules and barriers by brawling both in and out of the ring. Hard core enthusiasts will soon be able to wrestle far outside the ring, including backstage, locker/dressing rooms and garage areas, components not available in any other title currently on the market.

WCW Mayhem for both the PlayStation and N64(TM) is being developed by Kodiak Interactive Software Studios and will be published by Electronic Arts worldwide this fall.

The WCW Mayhem product web site from Electronic Arts will be available in mid-April by logging on: http://www.wcwmayhem.com.

Sega Makes Play for Dreamcast Support

How is Sega going to re-enter the game console market after crashing-and-burning with the Saturn?

With a massive push to retailers and developers, said Bernie Stolar,

president and chief operating officer of Sega America Ltd. Inc., in a keynote address here at the Game Developers Conference Wedneday.

"Sega is going to take back market share," Stolar promised. During his keynote, he showed off about a dozen games that will be available in the U.S. this fall. He also took several jabs at Sony's PlayStation 2 announcement. "Our competitors are so frightened that they are rushing their product to market," he said.

The thrust of his push, however, was increased support for developers. "We will provide 360-degree support for your Dreamcast titles," Stolar told the crowd of software creators.

Sega has a lot to make up for with software creators.

Sega's 16-bit Saturn system is considered a prime example of what not to do in the market. Saturn only sold 2.7 million units in the U.S. by the end of 1998, according to Gary Gabelhouse, president of entertainment market watcher Fairfield Research Inc. Sony, meanwhile, sold more than 13.4 million PlayStations.

As the Saturn's failure became evident, developers jumped ship; while Sony's PlayStation has spurred the creation of about 170 titles every year since 1996, the number of titles released each year on the Sega platform fell from 119 in 1996 to 12 last year, according to data released by media market watcher NPD Group.

Sega says things will be different this time around. Already, Sega has shipped over 1 million of the consoles in Japan since its November launch, and expects retailers to log 250,000 to 300,000 preorders for the system before its U.S. launch, almost three times more than Sony's preorders before it launched the PlayStation.

Stolar also claims that more than 100 companies are developing for the platform. As proof, he showed off almost a dozen games, including Virtual Fighter 3tb, Rally 2, Sonic Avenger, and House of the Dead 2 -- important titles that will make up the staple of sales at launch. Sega also showed off two sports games -- basketball and football -- developed internally.

In addition, Stolar put to rest criticism about the Dreamcast console's lack of support for digital video disk technology. "When DVD reaches a comfortable price point for consumers and developers, we will add support for it to the Dreamcast," However, whether "support" consists of a separate DVD-enhanced product or built-in support was not clear.

He noted that the new console will have a 56kbps modem for the U.S., a slight upgrade from the 33.6kbps modem used in Japan.

Despite the features, Dreamcast is about games and getting those games developed, said Stolar. "Dreamcast is as alive as the games you develop," said Sega's Stolar.

Of course, that cuts both ways.

Development and Offers Free Developer Toolkit

NewTek, the pioneer in desktop digital video and 3D animation software

solutions, announced today that LightWave 3D’s modeling and animation tools make it the premier solution for creating games for the Sony PlayStation market. Registered PlayStation console developers can download the latest LightWave 3D development toolkit free from the PlayStation developer site.

The LightWave 3D toolkit includes translators for objects and images as well as full scene support. The export utility supports LightWave 3D motion, skeletal deformation with bones, and multi morph support through morph gizmo files. It is available free to download for registered PlayStation developers from the developers web site.

Superior Development Tools

LightWave 3D has always been well known as the most efficient modeling tool available. LightWave 3D’s subdivision surfaces engine and metanurbs are quick and easy to use and allow developers to create multiple LOD (Level of Detail) objects automatically. The native polygonal modeler is the best modeler for game creation. With support for triangles, quads, and n-gons, users have an incredible arsenal to work with when low ploy modeling for real-time game play.

"LightWave 3D’s modeler is one of the best low-polygon modelers available, with very straightforward modeling tools and a no-nonsense interface," said Larry Schultz, a freelance game developer now working with Sony Entertainment. "One of LightWave 3D’s most powerful features for low-polygon modelers is its splines, particularly how it handles spline patches."

Splines allow the artist to quickly sketch out a model in 3D. Scanned artwork can be imported into the modeler and used as a template from which to create a 3D model. As a result, the 3D artist can create models that follow the concept art closely and accurately. Other 3D programs support splines and NURBS, but they lack the ability for artists to control the polygon count on a patch-by-patch basis.

"This patch-level control is very important in low-polygon modeling because the exact placement of polygons and vertices becomes critical," explained Schultz. "Spline patching in LightWave 3D allows me to control the polygon count as I go, so I can have more polygons in critical areas and fewer in less-important areas."

"LightWave 3D was instrumental in the production of Jersey Devil," said Christian Aubert, technical director of Behaviour Interactive. "Quite frankly, the game couldn’t have been done without it. LightWave 3D’s fast polygonal modeling is probably the best out there, and it’s simple enough that all our staff could be up and running in a matter of days. LightWave 3D’s well-documented file format allows for easy integration into our art path and custom development tools, which is a must for game development houses."

In addition to LightWave 3D’s superior modeling tools, PlayStation developers rely on LightWave 3D’s animation tools to create "cut scenes" with Full Motion Video. "Cut scenes are used to augment the feeling of the game and give the player more realistic scenery and action," said Brad Peebler, vice president of marketing for NewTek. "The ability to create and add cut scenes to a game giving it more a more realistic feeling is what sets PlayStation games apart from their competition. Since LightWave 3D is the number one tool of choice for video and TV production, game developers have found it to be an invaluable tool when creating full

motion video for cut scenes. After all, if you're making a movie for a game, shouldn't you use the same tools Hollywood uses for making big screen movies?" Peebler continued.

NewTek is currently working with Sony to help develop 3D tools for the current development system as well as next generation tools. LightWave 3D modeling, animation and rendering tools are designed to help streamline development of games for the PlayStation environment. LightWave 3D tools include:

Modeling Tools
- Native polygonal modeler
- Spline modeling
- Subdivision surfaces
- Direct vertex control
- Extensibility
- Modeling plug ins (free)

Animation Tools
- Intuitive keyframer
- Bones for skeletal deformation
- Morph gizmo for lip sync and detailed morphing
- Extensibilty

Rendering Tools
- Selective Time Based Ray Tracing Engine with reflection, refraction and shadows
- True motions blur
- Real world cameras
- Lens flares and optical effects
- HyperVoxel (1.0) rendering engine
- Cel Shading technology

Atari Games Receives Japanese Patent on Force Feedback Steering

The Japanese Patent Office issued a Japanese Patent Grant to Atari Games Corporation, effective November 6, 1998, relating to Atari Games' Force Feedback Steering technology.

Atari Games originally filed for the patent in Japan in January, 1990. The recently-issued Japanese Patent Number 2847411 corresponds to US Patent Number 5,044,956, granted to Atari Games in 1991, as well as corresponding patents issued in Europe.

The Japanese patent entitled, "Control Device Such As A Steering Wheel for Video Vehicle Simulator With Realistic Feedback Forces," will remain in effect through January 10, 2010 and covers the core force feedback steering technology which Atari Games created and first introduced to the video game industry with its Hard Drivin'(R) arcade game in 1989. Atari Games' patent is currently widely applied in arcade driving games and is also applicable to home platform games using steering wheels that feature force feedback which simulate the actual feel of driving.

In a related announcement, Atari Games and Sega Enterprises announced that they have entered a patent cross-license agreement. For undisclosed financial terms, Atari Games has granted Sega Enterprises a worldwide non-exclusive license to its force feedback steering technology for use in

Sega’s arcade games and Sega’s home video game systems. Sega Enterprise has also granted Atari Games a non-exclusive worldwide license to its "viewpoint changeover" technology. Sega Enterprises was recently granted a Japanese patent for this viewpoint changeover technology which allows a video game player to choose from a multiple number of pre-set points of view.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Justice Dept Permits AOL To Buy Netscape

The Justice Department Friday permitted America Online to acquire Netscape Communications Corp. and enter into a strategic alliance with Sun Microsystems Inc.

‘‘The division has decided that it will not challenge the transaction, having concluded that neither the merger nor the alliance violate the antitrust laws," said the Justice Department in a statement. The Microsoft Corp. has said that the deal makes irrelevant its trial on antitrust charges brought by the Justice Department and 19 states.

‘‘Obviously, we’re pleased and look forward to the Netscape shareholder meeting on the 17th of March," said Jim Whitney, a spokesman for AOL at its headquarters in Dulles, Virginia. A Netscape spokeswoman referred calls to AOL.

Witnesses from AOL, Sun and Netscape all appeared as witnesses for the government at the Microsoft trial, which is in recess until next month or later.

Netscape has been the centerpiece of the government case against Microsoft. The government alleges that Microsoft used monopoly power in the market for its Windows operating systems to compete unfairly against Netscape.

Both companies make Web browsers to surf the Internet, a global network of computer networks.

AOL Will Let Netscape Be Netscape

Shortly after America Online revealed it would buy Netscape, AOL chairman Steve Case flew out to the Web software pioneer’s headquarters to address its workers. The subject was hairy.

‘‘You can still bring your dogs to work," he told a cheering crowd of

2,000 Netscape employees.

That comment, related by several attendees, seemed no small concession from a company whose cautious corporate culture, some feared, could snuff out the freewheeling creativity of Netscape.

On Wednesday, Netscape shareholders vote on the $9.9 billion deal. If they say yes, as expected, the deal could close within days. But the real work in combining these very different companies is just starting.

AOL's ability to soothe Netscape's coveted army of software designers is key to creating what could be a powerful new threat to Microsoft's computer software dominance.

Once the deal is completed, AOL becomes the distributor of Netscape's Internet browser software and adds the Netcenter Web site, giving it two of the four most popular Internet destinations. Also part of the deal, Sun Microsystems Inc., a maker of business software and computers, will distribute Netscape's corporate software for three years.

So far, AOL's assurances to Netscape staff appear to be working. Common goals, such as making the Internet easy to navigate, are helping to bridge the divide of culture and distance.

Relatively few Netscape employees have quit since the Nov. 24 agreement, thanks in part to Case's promise to pay an extra month's salary as a bonus for sticking around. Others are waiting for Netscape stock options to take effect so they can sell stock at fat profits.

Netscape's Marc Andreessen, who co-invented the first widely used browser for finding and retrieving Internet information, signed on as chief technology officer of AOL.

''The reason I'm here is because they have a really good story," Andreessen, 27, said Monday from his car phone near AOL's Dulles, Va. headquarters. Though not discussing pay, he recently bought a Virgina ''starter palace" so he can shuttle from his Palo Alto, Calif. home. The hardest choice is which home his three dogs will live in.

Still, the differences that make the marriage a leap of faith were apparent in visits this year to the companies' headquarters 3,000 miles apart.

It's tough to find AOL subscribers, and there are 16 million of them, in Netscape's Mountain View, Calif. offices. While Netscape created the tool for people to surf the Net on their own, AOL supplies neatly organized channels of information for ''newbies," or Internet beginners who otherwise might be groping.

Netscape conference rooms are named after Dennis the Menace and other cartoon characters. One top software manager wore his hair shoulder-length, and sported black fingernail polish and a T-shirt emblazoned with a heavy-metal band logo.

In Dulles, Va., America Online's halls are dotted with posters touting ''Valued Work Behaviors" and ''Valued Leadership Abilities." While many of its 10,000 employees playfully decorate their offices - giant chess pieces adorn the online games department - the company's corporate-sounding ''Mission Statement" is carved into common entrances.

Such platitudes seem bound to rankle freer spirits.

While AOL pledges to keep Netscape autonomous with separate headquarters and staff, it may merge some overlapping parts. Netscape also could be hit by cuts in divisions that make software already made by Sun Microsystems, observers say. Morale may suffer due to the departure of James Barksdale, Netscape's well-liked chief executive.

The physical distance is a challenge; staff needs to spend longer hours swapping e-mails and shuttling cross-country. ''The issue is it takes a lot of stamina and a lot of willingness to communicate through a longer day," said Barry Obrand of Russell Reynolds Associates Inc., a Silicon Valley recruiting firm.

Yet similarities could help smooth things.

Both companies arose in the Internet's dawn, and are infused with go-getter mentalities.

They repeatedly ''morphed" to survive - AOL by linking its members-only online service to the broader Internet, and Netscape by going from just browsers to building corporate software and a Web site geared toward businesses.

AOL already has practice preserving the unique identities of acquired companies.

Despite concerns that users of ICQ, a sophisticated instant messaging service AOL bought last June, would flee, membership has soared. CompuServe, the competing members-only online service also bought by AOL, retains its Columbus, Ohio headquarters and much of its staff.

''We learned some things about respecting the special cultural ways of companies involved" in acquisitions, said AOL spokeswoman Kathy Bushkin.

The lack of worry permeated even Netscape's Mozilla.org unit, which develops the famous Navigator browser that faces an increasingly difficult challenge from Microsoft.

Asked if the takeover could quash Netscape's competitive essence, Mozilla.org's nail polish-wearing manager Jamie Zawinsky seemed nonplussed.

''There were a lot of people worried about that," he said. ''But it sounds like business as usual."

AOL-Netscape: A DOJ case breaker?

By Connie Guglielmo, ZDNet

I'm missing something in Microsoft's "Let's call the whole thing off" campaign to get the government to drop its antitrust case, a campaign prompted by America Online's announcement that it plans to buy Netscape Communications.

Reports are circulating that when Microsoft returns to court next month, it's going to argue that the proposed $4.3 billion merger changes the competitive landscape in such a way that the U.S. Department of Justice's antitrust case against Microsoft will become a moot point. After the

AOL-Netscape deal was announced in November 1998, Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates argued just that, saying he found it "hard to believe the government can still push its case with a straight face" given the proposed alliance. The alliance includes a technology and product distribution deal with Sun Microsystems. The merger, Gates said, shows that competition in the technology industry is alive and well.

It seems to me that calling off the DOJ trial now because Netscape found itself a well-financed parent would be like telling the victim of a car accident that the case against the drunk driver is being called off a year later because the injured's broken limbs have healed. "Sure you can't walk around on your own, but you've got a nice powerful wheelchair that gives you mobility. Case dismissed." In that scenario, there's nothing preventing the driver from hitting the road again.

Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, the federal judge presiding over the case, had some concerns about the deal's impact as well. Over the course of the past few months, he's asked the government's witnesses and Microsoft's lawyers to answer questions about the effect a combined AOL-Netscape would have on the industry. He also said that the deal might create "a very significant change in the playing field as far as this industry is concerned."

This is where I'm missing something. The AOL-Netscape deal doesn't change history. As I understand it, Microsoft was dragged into court on charges that, over the past several years, it has used its operating system monopoly -- and the distribution might it holds over the PC software industry -- to hinder its competitors' ability to compete in the software marketplace. Netscape's browser tale is a case in point, but it's not the only example that has come up in the trial. AOL, Apple Computer, Intel and Sun all have described the tactics they say Microsoft used to sway deals and influence partners.

Gates said that because of the AOL-Netscape deal, Microsoft now faces more formidable competitors. That's certainly true in the content services arena. The merger pits a combined AOL-Netscape content service against the still-under-construction Microsoft Network. The Sun angle also introduces the possibility that Microsoft might face some stiffer competition as it tries to sell Windows servers to enterprise customers.

AOL-Netscape-Sun together might have a better chance at getting more people turned on to Java. That, in turn, could help Java live up to its promise of being the user interface to PCs and handheld devices - making the choice of operating system (OS) less important than Microsoft would like.

But all those possibilities don't add up to reality -- at least not yet. The last time I checked, neither AOL nor Netscape were in the operating system business -- no matter how optimistic one is about Java's potential. Nothing in the plans they announced about the merger indicates that the combined AOL-Netscape will undermine the distribution food chain that Microsoft has developed with the major PC makers, or will limit what third-party technology Microsoft can throw into the OS mix, or what technology the folks in Redmond, Wash., can give away because they've got all the OS revenue to subsidize the freebies. Isn't Microsoft's OS monopoly, and its abuse of that monopoly, what this case is all about?

I have to believe that Microsoft thinks so too, given that the very first of the 12 witnesses the company called to testify on its behalf was a former White House economist and is the present dean of the business school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He spent his time on the

stand arguing -- unsuccessfully, as it turned out -- that the DOJ and 19 states plus the District of Columbia had failed to show Microsoft is a monopolist.

But hey, I'm neither a lawyer nor an antitrust expert. So when the AOL-Netscape deal was announced, I talked to some people who are. I asked them if they thought the AOL-Netscape deal should affect the trial.

Hillard Sterling, an antitrust lawyer at the Chicago law firm of Gordon and Glickson, said the deal "undercuts the government's position that competitors are unable to effectively counter Microsoft. The court looks to whether activities in the marketplace enhance competition. While Netscape's going out of business would evidence competitive problems, this deal shows there is a competitive landscape. Netscape has responded to Microsoft by going into a voluntary pact with a significant partner."

Voluntary? What if the company was forced to sell out in part because Microsoft's allegedly unfair business tactics drove it out of the browser business in the first place? Sterling argues that the "motivation behind the deal is irrelevant." What counts, he said, is the merger's effect. "Netscape's merger clearly yields competitive benefits for Netscape and arguably for the industry. At the same time, Microsoft faces a more formidable competitor . . . the DOJ is left complaining about the harshness of Microsoft's business approach. Harsh business conduct does not an antitrust violation make."

Maybe. But Microsoft is the only company I know of in this industry that's got a consent decree, born of five years of negotiations, hanging over its head. The rules of business for Microsoft are different -- given it's unique market position -- and everybody knows it, including the handful of Microsoft executives who testified on the stand and acknowledged that they've done a lot to exploit that position.

Donald Falk, an antitrust lawyer at Washington, D.C.-based Mayer, Brown and Platt, thinks the court shouldn't let the AOL-Netscape deal lead to a dismissal of the government's case. "It leaves the Microsoft monopoly in place. It leaves Microsoft's exclusionary business practices in place. It leaves every effort of Microsoft to retain its monopoly by whatever means it can," he said. "Microsoft likes to say this case is about Netscape. But the case is about Microsoft's long, durable monopoly and its long history of exclusionary conduct in support of the monopoly."

"This is the first time I've heard someone citing a merger as a reason to ignore antitrust law," added Falk, who is a supporter of the Project to Promote Competition & Innovation in the Digital Age, a lobbyist group that supports the government's case. The group's backers include Netscape, Oracle and Sun. "Microsoft's market power has been based on its control of OS. It had that yesterday, it has it today and it will have it tomorrow. They will continue to have it down the road unless they are restrained."

It's up to Judge Jackson to decide if the AOL-Netscape merger has bearing. So far, he's shown himself capable of distinguishing between hyperbole and fact. I've got to think he'll see the merger not as a case breaker, but as a further sign of how difficult it is for any one company to avoid crashing into the center divide while Microsoft continues to dictate the rules of the road.

U.S. FTC Approves Intel Settlement

The Federal Trade Commission settled antitrust charges against Intel Corp. Wednesday, approving an agreement that bars the chip maker from severing business ties with customers who sue it.

‘‘If you have an intellectual property dispute, Intel cannot cut you off," said FTC Chairman Robert Pitofsky at a news conference after the 3-0 vote. Without the agreement, Pitofsky said Intel was able to use monopoly power to muscle customers into giving up trade secrets to Intel without compensation.

Intel carved out an important exception that had not been made public last week, when the FTC announced a staff agreement on the eve of a major antitrust trial against Intel.

Under the exception, if a customer sues Intel and seeks an injunction to prevent the company from selling its chips, then Intel is free to withhold samples and technical information that the customer needs to stay in business.

Pitofsky said that achieving a balance was important because no company would be permitted to shut down the other.

‘‘We’re not on Intel’s side, we’re not on the challenger’s side," Pitofsky said. ‘‘We’re on the consumer’s side."

The public has 60 days to comment on the settlement, after which the commission is expected to make it final.

The FTC had alleged that Intel withheld information and product samples from Intergraph Corp., Compaq Computer Corp. and Digital Equipment Corp., which has since been purchased by Compaq.

Intel was trying to coerce the firms into licensing their patented inventions to Intel, the FTC charged.

All of the parties involved -- the FTC, Intel, Compaq and Intergraph -- expressed satisfaction with the agreement.

In the final agreement, Intel did not have to admit it was a monopolist. That is important because an admission that Intel holds a monopoly would make it easier for others to win suits against the Santa Clara, Calif.-based firm.

Intel President and Chief Executive Craig Barrett said in a statement the company was ‘‘very gratified that we could come to these terms with the FTC in a cooperative spirit.

‘‘Although we have different interpretations regarding Intel’s market position and the legality of our past actions, the compromise provides a framework for resolving future intellectual property disputes with our customers," Barrett said.

Pitofsky also praised Intel for making the deal possible.

One of the high-profile disputes the commission examined was a lawsuit Intergraph brought against Intel.

Intergraph won a preliminary injunction against Intel, but that injunction

has been appealed and both sides await the decision of an appellate panel.

In a statement, Intergraph said that the FTC settlement provides ‘‘an additional protection for Intergraph. Should the preliminary injunction in Intergraph’s lawsuit happen to be lifted on appeal, Intergraph is still protected by this consent decree."

Intergraph earlier Wednesday lauded the consent decree between the FTC and Intel, but said it will continue with its own antitrust case against the world’s largest chip maker.

A Compaq spokesman said the company supports the settlement because it believes it ‘‘sufficiently addresses the interests of the industry and, more importantly, the consumer."

FCC: No Internet Regulation Plans

The chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, bombarded anew with e-mails from computer users fearing government regulation of the Internet, tried again Thursday to dispel the notion.

‘‘I want to say this as clearly as I can ... as long as I’m chairman of the Federal Communications Commission this agency will not regulate the Internet,’’ Bill Kennard told a meeting of telecommunications and Internet analysts.

Kennard was addressing rumors that have circulated on the Internet for a long time as well as concerns by some consumer groups.

The FCC last month concluded that a computer user’s dial-up calls to the Internet are interstate communications subject to federal jurisdiction. Internet dial-ups have been treated as local calls.

The FCC has said this decision merely resolves a dispute among phone companies over how to compensate each other for Internet connections and how to clarify the role of state and federal regulators. The agency said the decision will not affect how consumers tap into the Internet or how much they pay.

But consumer groups and others believe the action inadvertently could lead to higher charges in the future for Internet access by computer users.

‘‘It’s not going to happen,’’ Kennard said. He repeated that the FCC has no intention of making computer users pay long-distance fees for dial-up access to the Internet, as people now pay when they make long-distance telephone calls.

Still, ‘‘these rumors get on the Internet that the big bad FCC is going to impose all this regulation on the Internet,’’ Kennard said.

‘‘Now I know this painfully because every so often when one of these rumors flares up I get, literally, about 600 e-mail messages a day by people who are telling me to keep my hands off the Internet,’’ Kennard added.

Separately, Kennard said the FCC is monitoring to ensure cable companies providing high-speed Internet services are not freezing out competitors or restricting consumers’ options for Internet service.

The FCC, in recent decisions, has declined to force cable companies to share their high-speed lines with competitors. But the FCC has said it would keep watch.

Kennard said the FCC is organizing meetings with the various stakeholders in this debate ‘‘so that we can get a better handle on the problem and monitor the marketplace.’’

Consumer groups, public interest advocates, America Online and others continue to press the FCC to require that cable companies give other companies access to those lines so they can offer competing services. The cable industry and ATT

AT&T, which just acquired cable giant Tele-Communications Inc., oppose the idea.

Microsoft To Unveil Reorganization In ’Near Future’

Microsoft Corp. plans to unveil a long-awaited reorganization soon that will include new leadership for its struggling MSN division and a closer focus on customer groups.

Microsoft Chief Operating Officer Bob Herbold, responding to a question at a shareholders meeting, said the reorganization plan would be announced formally in the ‘‘near future," although he declined to give details.

The plan, first disclosed by The Seattle Times more than a month ago, would divide the company into four main divisions focusing on consumers, developers, enterprise customers and "knowledge workers" rather than its current organization based on product groups.

The realignment had been expected to be finalized by now, but Microsoft President Steve Ballmer apparently has had trouble with a key component: finding an executive to take over the company’s online efforts, including the msn.com portal site.

Ballmer has been acting chief of the division since December when group Vice President Pete Higgins left to take a personal leave of absence.

‘‘They need a key player in that position, and I’m sure that is a high priority for Ballmer," said Mike Kwatinetz, an analyst with Credit Suisse First Boston. ‘‘They do have some very good things to build around, but there’s been nobody who has been able to really crystallize things."

While msn.com has risen to the No. 3 consumer site on the Web since its relaunch as a portal site last year, the division has had to change course frequently in an effort to keep from being badly outflanked by rivals including America Online Inc. and Yahoo Inc.

‘‘They’re still playing catch-up," Kwatinetz said.

Brad Silverberg, the Microsoft executive who headed development of the Windows 95 operating system but has been on leave since 1997, had been considered a leading candidate to head the consumer division including MSN, but he has turned down the job, as have executives from several leading Internet companies, according to The Wall Street Journal.

The latest plan is to divide responsibility for the consumer division between Jon DeVaan, a vice president in charge of Microsoft's Office applications, and Brad Chase, vice president for Windows marketing and developer relations, the newspaper reported.

A Microsoft spokeswoman declined to comment on the report.

Jim Balderston, an analyst at Zona Research, said the reorganization could help Microsoft respond to rapidly changing markets.

Microsoft is faced with a problem companies face when they get fairly large," he said. ''There can be a sort of an inertia that creeps in. The chain of command gets really long. That can slow not only decision-making but also dampen people's initiative."

While Microsoft has responded well in the past to the challenges of the Internet, that is no guarantee it will in the future, he said.

The planned reorganization is not related to Microsoft's antitrust trial in Washington, currently in recess, company officials said. If Microsoft loses, government prosecutors could seek a much more radical restructuring dividing the company into several stand-alone pieces.

Microsoft, which late Thursday announced plans to shift about $400 million in revenue into its fiscal fourth quarter, fell $1.25 to close at $160.19 in heavy Nasdaq trading. Shareholders authorized the company to issue more shares to accommodate a stock split effective March 26.

Nineteen States To Seek Microsoft Overhaul

Nineteen state attorneys general, who joined the federal government's antitrust suit against Microsoft Corp., said if they win the case, they want a revamp of the software giant, the New York Times reported in Tuesday's editions, citing several attorneys general.

''The mere thought that people are talking about dividing up the company now shows that the thinking has advanced. It was mentioned before, but not discussed with the level of plausibility it's being discussed now," one attorney general, who asked not to be identified, told the newspaper.

The attorneys general are currently debating a couple potential structural remedies of which the one least favored would break the company into two or three parts, the newspaper reported.

State officials told the newspaper that idea had lost popularity because whichever company had the Windows operating system would still hold a monopoly.

Another idea is to split the company into three equal parts, each of which would have complete copies of Microsoft's source code and intellectual property.

Apple To Launch Mac OS For Servers

Apple Computer Inc. is expected Tuesday to introduce a version of its Macintosh operating system for computer servers and possibly details on the next version of the operating system for its popular personal computers.

The major upgrade of the software, its biggest overhaul in many years, will combine features from the current Mac OS and Next Computer Inc's Rhapsody operating system.

Apple acquired Next in late 1996, as it was developing Rhapsody.

The server version of the Mac OS, which is software to run Macintosh-based networks, was expected to be available sometime before the big upgrade of the Mac OS later this year.

''It's going to take a while for it to build (a customer base)," said Lou Mazzucchelli, an analyst at Gerard Klauer Mattison & Co., but he added that the server version of the new operating system has some key features, such as the ability to stream video across networks.

A spokeswoman for Apple Computer in Cupertino, Calif. would only say that Apple plans a significant software and strategy announcement Tuesday. Apple interim chief executive Steve Jobs will be making the announcements.

Apple faces some tough competition in the server area, with the Linux free operating system gaining more support from major computer makers and increasingly widespread use among Internet service providers and Web site applications.

But Mazzucchelli pointed out that he expects Apple to offer a better pricing model than Microsoft Corp.'s Windows NT operating system.

''It will be licensed on a per server basis and it will be more palatable than Windows NT licensing," Mazzucchelli said, adding that Microsoft licenses Windows NT on a per user basis.

Apple Offers Some Software Code Free To Developers

Apple Computer Inc. said Tuesday it would take the rare step of giving developers free access to the source code to parts of its just-released operating system software for computer servers that run networks.

Apple said the move, part of the so-called ''open source" movement fueled in part by the emergence of the Linux operating system, will hopefully get more developers interested in its Mac OS server software.

The Cupertino, Calif.-based company, which unveiled its Mac OS X Server software Tuesday, said the move was the first time a major computer maker has made any of its system software available to the open source community.

The new Mac OS Server software will be used to host Web sites and run networks of Macintosh computers, which are especially important in the education market where many schools use Macintoshes.

''By putting our source code out there and making it freely available, they (developers) will make improvements," Apple's interim chief executive and

co-founder Steve Jobs told a press conference at Apple’s Cupertino, Calif. headquarters.

Jobs also brought out Eric Raymond, the president of the Open Source Initiative and Brian Behlendorf, a co-founder of the Apache Web server software project, to voice their support for Apple’s move.

The open source software movement has been getting a lot of notice as many major computer and software companies have announced support of the Linux operating system that is given away over the Internet.

Linux is a version of the Unix operating system, developed by Finnish programmer Linus Torvalds and maintained by a group of far-flung programmers.

Apple called its open source release of the Mac OS Server "Darwin." The first release of Darwin contains the foundation layer of the Mac OS X Server and some components that are already freely available to developers over the Internet, such as the Mach 2.5 microkernel, the BSD 4.4 operating system, a layer of the Unix multi-user operating system and the Apache Web server.

‘‘They didn’t make open any of the real proprietary stuff, like Web Objects or Open Step," said Lou Mazzucchelli, a Gerard Klauer Mattison & Co analyst. ‘‘But those (the layers available) are fundamental layers and people will have a chance to play with those."

Jobs declined to comment on whether Apple planned to offer other future Apple software to developers using the open source model, saying that the move was its first experiment.

‘‘We will see," Jobs said. ‘‘This is our first open source experience, but we have high hopes for it." He said Apple hopes its experience with open source becomes a model such as the Linux and Apache.

Analysts said it was unlikely that Apple would ever make available the entire source code to the company’s core Macintosh operating system, the next version of which will be called Mac OS X (ten).

‘‘That is unlikely," said Chris Le Toq, an analyst at Gartner Group’s Dataquest. ‘‘Their OS (operating system) depends on a proprietary hardware system."

Apple said that Mac OS X Server is available now at a lower price than it had originally planned in January. Apple said it has priced Mac OS X Server at $499 for an unlimited client license. It is also available preloaded on a Macintosh Server G3 computer for $4,999.

‘‘I think it’s an interesting toe-in-the-water kind of thing," said Mazzucchelli of Apple’s foray into open source.

Microsoft To Release Windows 98 2nd Edition In Fall

Microsoft Corp. Chairman Bill Gates said Thursday the company planned to release the second edition of its Windows 98 operating system in the fall.

Gates said at a launch event for the company’s new Internet Explorer 5.0

browser that the operating system upgrade would be sold in retail stores and be preloaded on most new computers.

The new edition of Microsoft’s latest consumer-oriented operating system will include the new browser as well as new device drivers and other updates, Gates said.

Windows 98 was released last year as the upgrade to the widely used Windows 95 platform.

He also said Microsoft was getting ‘‘pretty close" to releasing the last major beta test version of its Windows 2000, operating system, which he said would provide the foundation for all future systems.

Windows 2000, previously known as Windows NT 5.0, is a long-delayed upgrade to Microsoft’s desk-top and server operating system for businesses and network use.

Gates declined to say specifically when the Windows NT technology would be integrated into consumer versions of Windows.

Iowa Couple Challenging Amazon.com

Linda and Lyle Bowlin are mounting a modest challenge to bookselling giant Amazon.com - and demonstrating, perhaps, the democratic power of the Internet - from the comfort of their own home.

‘‘There isn’t a reason why anybody else out there can’t open up a business on the Internet and be successful," says Bowlin, sitting in what used to be his dining room but now houses two computers and stacks of book orders.

Since November 1997, Bowlin, formerly a grocery produce manager and now a professor of small-business development at the University of Northern Iowa, has been selling books over the Internet, first as a hobby that involved only self-help books, now as a business that supplies best sellers.

Bowlin found he could buy from Amazon.com’s same wholesalers for about the same price if he ordered at least five copies of the same book.

And with his 18-year-old daughter doing the accounting, his wife doing the shipping and Bowlin managing the Internet site, their low overhead meant they could sell for less than Amazon.com.

Recently, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman cited Bowlin’s business - positively-you.com - as an testament to the power of the Internet and evidence that some Internet stocks are overvalued.

‘‘There aren’t 20,000 people who can produce software like Microsoft, but there are 20,000 who can set up bookstores or vitamin stores or video stores," Bowlin says. ‘‘That’s where the stock market missed the boat."

Bowlin says his startup costs were about $2,500.

Sales have grown from about $400 a month to $4,000 a day. Books lie in neat rows across the living room floor, boxes of padded mailing packages are stacked ceiling-high against a wall, and the coffee table doubles as a shipping table.

‘‘This isn’t my hobby, this is work," Mrs. Bowlin laments as she places books in mailing packages and slaps handwritten mailing labels on them.

Analysts say it is difficult to say what Bowlin’s success proves and what effect such businesses will have on big Internet stocks. But one analyst says it llustrates how the Internet allows almost anyone to compete with big, established businesses.

‘‘When you’re online, you are immediately a multinational company in the sense you have mulitnational reach," said Robert Hormats, vice chairman of Goldman Sachs International. ‘‘But it also means that established companies have to take competition from places they never dreamed of and companies that perhaps did not exist a year ago."

Bowlin’s business volume is nowhere near Amazon.com’s 1998 sales of $609 million and he admits that he alone will not compete head-to-head with the bookseller. But with an estimated $24 billion book market, there is plenty of room for others like himself, Bowlin says.

‘‘There are about 5,000 independent booksellers out there and with a little extra investment they can be incredibly successful," Bowlin says. ‘‘En masse, they pose a real threat."

John Hooks, a computer systems and science professor at Pace University in New York, says Internet stock is not overvalued because it represents the expected earnings of the Internet of the future.

Moreover, Hooks says, ‘‘the buying public is not interested in transacting business with people they don’t know. That’s a large hurdle for mom-and-pop shops."

Bowlin, who is also director of the Small Business Development Center at UNI, plans to hire people and move the business out of the house soon. He says he is weighing offers to go public that could quickly make him a millionaire.

‘‘I’m an entrepreneur," Bowlin says. ‘‘There’s nothing wrong with that."

Intel Launches Pentium III Xeon Chip

Intel Corp. said it introduced the latest in its recently launched Pentium III line, the Pentium III Xeon processor for computer workstations and servers that connect networked computers.

A vast array of computer makers also said they were launching workstations and servers designed around the Pentium III Xeon, including Dell Computer Corp., Hewlett-Packard Co., Silicon Graphics Inc., Compaq Computer Corp. and International Business Machines Corp.

The chipmaker said the new chip is intended to bolster its presence in e-commerce and high-end computing solutions.

Intel introduced its Pentium III Xeon initially running at speeds of 500 megahertz, and a 550 megahertz version will ship next month. A chip set, called the Profusion, will be available next quarter for high-end servers with eight processors.

Pricing for the processors, in 1,000-unit quantities, is $931 for the 500-megahertz Xeon with 512 kilobytes of level two cache memory, and $1,980 with one megabyte L2 cache memory.

The Pentium III Xeon also contains the controversial Processor Serial Number feature, which is an identifying number for each system. It is intended for improved security while buying goods over the Internet and other transactions. Privacy groups have been in an uproar about the feature, saying it infringes on consumer privacy.

Intel executives said the security feature will be in an "on" position for the workstation and server markets, whereas for consumer PCs, many computer makers have used Intel's software utility patch to turn the feature to an ''off" position.

''There is almost no controversy over the feature in that space," said Mike Aymar, an Intel vice president, adding that corporate information technology departments want the feature to track systems on a corporate network.

Intel said that more and more workstations and servers are being designed around its architecture. Workstations are typically used by engineers, architects and others who use systems for design layout, computer-aided design, etc.

International Data Corp. of Framingham, Mass. said that Intel-based workstations now make up 59 percent of the market, based on unit shipments. Other competitors in this market are Sun Microsystems Inc., with workstations using its Sparc processor, IBM and its PowerPC architecture, HP's PA/RISC and Compaq Computer Corp.'s Digital workstations with Alpha chips. Compaq and H-P also make workstations based on Intel chips.

In servers, which are computers used to run and manage corporate networks, host Internet Web sites or electronic mail systems, Intel has about 80 percent of total units shipped, according to IDC.

Microsoft Has New Internet Software

Microsoft Corp. is releasing a new version of its Internet Explorer software that appears less integrated with the Windows operating system, making it easier to separate some Web navigation features from computer desktop functions.

Critics said the features in Internet Explorer 5.0, which will be available starting Thursday, are inconsistent with Microsoft's steadfast contention in its antitrust battle that its Web browser is an essential part of the Windows operating system.

The government, in an ongoing suit, accuses Microsoft of using its dominance of the personal computer market to illegally force consumers who use Windows to also use its browser, dissuading them from using the popular Netscape Navigator browser.

Roughly 90 percent of the world's personal computers run on the Windows operating system.

‘‘It’s certainly inconsistent with the proposition that Internet Explorer is inherently and always a distinct part of the operating system," said Jonathan Jacobson, an antitrust attorney with the New York law firm of Akin Gump.

A Microsoft official rejected suggestions that the new Explorer is less closely integrated with Windows, reiterating the company’s position that it merely gives consumers what they want. Shawn Sanford, product manager for Internet Explorer, said the underlying source code was still shared by the new browser and Windows.

‘‘When you talk about integration you’re talking about underlying (code)," he said. ‘‘Those processes are still as tightly integrated in IE 5.0 as they were in (the previous version)."

A Justice Department spokeswoman declined to comment.

The new Internet Explorer offers a variety of minor improvements such as faster viewing of Web pages and a reduced tendency to ‘‘crash" when retrieving Internet information.

When installed on computers running with Windows 95, users also will find fewer Web-related features meshed with desktop functions. Gone is Microsoft’s ‘‘Active Desktop," which makes files stored in the computer look and act like Web pages with links to the Internet.

But users of Windows 98 machines, which build Web-related features into the desktop functions, won’t see these changes by installing Internet Explorer 5.0.

The new browser ‘‘seems to be less ambitious in terms of integration compared to 4.0, which made itself part of the operating system," said Barry Parr, an analyst with International Data Corp., based in Mountain View, Calif.

‘‘When you originally installed 4.0, it became your desktop. Anytime it opened a file, it would open a browser window."

Windows 95 users who try to disable the new browser after installing will no longer see the process referred to as ‘‘uninstall." Instead, the computer says, ‘‘restore previous Windows configuration."

‘‘They’re trying to say it’s a Windows configuration and not a separate product," said Jim Rapoza, who tested the browser for the PC Week trade publication.

Sanford said the wording was changed because it more accurately reflected the process.

Livewire: What Happened To Online Services?

By Michelle V. Rafter

In the days before America Online was the people’s choice for getting online, the most popular on-ramps to what then was called the information superhighway were the proprietary online services: Prodigy, CompuServe, Delphi and Genie.Today, the world is AOL’s oyster. But what happened to

the rest?

AOL (http://www.aol.com) snapped up CompuServe (http://www.compuserve.com) from H&R Block last year, promptly sold the latter's network operations to MCI WorldCom (http://www.worldcom.com), and after a quiet 12 months of rebuilding is rolling out an ambitious relaunch called CompuServe 2000.

After eight years of struggle and more than $1 billion in investments, IBM and Sears sold their joint ownership in Prodigy (http://www.prodigy.com) in 1996 to an investor group that repositioned it as an Internet service provider (ISP) and took the company public last month.

After News Corp.'s 1995 attempt to meld Delphi (http://www.delphi.com) into an interactive joint venture with MCI stumbled, the service was sold to an investor group that's recreated it as an online forums expert. General Electric sold Genie (http://www.genie.com) in 1996 to a group of private investors who handed it off to Internet telephony provider IDT Corp. (http://www.idt.net), which let the service's subscriber base slip to a skeletal 5,000.

The former proprietary online services were built around closed programming languages that made it impossible for subscribers to connect to outside services. The popularity of the Internet, and the Web in particular, forced them to evolve or die. Evolve most have, though it's doubtful any can recapture their former glory, according to industry observers.

''It's really hard to turn around a business when you're talking about competition with players that are growing like RCN (http://www.rcn.com), which bundle cable TV and local telephone with Net services, or AOL or Microsoft (http://www.microsoft.com) that have critical mass," said Jupiter Communications analyst Zia Daniell Widger. ''To survive, they need to make all the right marketing moves."

That's exactly what's in the works at CompuServe. The Columbus, Ohio, company is promoting its revamped CompuServe 2000 service as the ISP of choice for cost-conscious adults and small businesses. Unlike AOL and other ISPs that charge a flat monthly rate for unlimited access, CompuServe 2000 charges $9.95 for 20 hours a month, $2.95 for each additional hour and premiums for news and research databases.

An estimated 17 million new Internet users will log on this year, many of them adults with no desire to be part of the lowest-common-denominator, glitz-fest that is AOL, said Audrey Weil, an AOL marketing guru before becoming CompuServe's chief operating officer nine months ago.

CompuServe ''is about grown-up content," she said. ''You won't find Leonardo DiCaprio hanging out on CompuServe (chat rooms) but you will find Roger Ebert talking about movie reviews."CompuServe also hopes to expand into hosting industry-specific private networks, a service it has provided to the aviation industry for more than a decade. In recent months, the company signed deals to co-host a WebMD (http://www.webmd.com) network for doctors, and to run a portal, or Internet gateway, service for MCI WorldCom customers.

Prodigy also chose to stay in the access business. The White Plains, N.Y., company, which is 86 percent owned by Mexico City-based Grupo Carso, now ranks as America's No. 6 ISP with an estimated 650,000 subscribers, behind AOL and CompuServe combined (16 million), MSN (http://www.msn.com) (1.8 million), AT&T WorldNet (http://www.att.net) (1.5 million), and MindSpring

(http://www.mindspring.net) and EarthLink (http://www.earthlink.net) (1.1 million each), according to Jupiter.

But in the eyes of Prodigy Chief Operating Officer David Trachtenberg, AOL is Prodigy's biggest rival. Prodigy, invigorated by a 129 percent subscriber jump in 1998, new management and the recent initial public offering, has launched an advertising campaign promoting itself as the best choice for Net users fed up with AOL's pop-up ads and rampant junk e-mail. Later this spring, Prodigy will kick off a bilingual service for Hispanic Net users in the United States and Mexico. In January, Prodigy opened a Web hosting service for small businesses, looking to leverage its technology and other assets.

The company will need to succeed in all its new enterprises to reverse millions of dollars in continuing losses. Trachtenberg thinks it can.''AOL loses a million customers a month, and a lot of ISPs can make a lot of money and be happy dealing with the customers they (AOL) lose on a monthly basis," he said.

Some former online contenders have moved on to other things.

As Delphi chief executive, Dan Bruns oversaw Delphi's sale to News Corp. in 1993, then bought the company back three years later, sold its ISP business and set about polishing its crown jewels, hundreds of public message boards on topics ranging from politics to boating. Since 1997, Bruns and a revamped executive team built Delphi into a community portal, signing up 1.5 million registered subscribers who post 40,000 messages a day to some 30,000 message forums.

Now, Delphi is pitching its forums expertise to companies that want to add message boards to their Web sites but don't want to do the work themselves.

Since establishing its outsourcing business, Delphi has signed up PlanetAll (http://www.planetall.com), ClassMates Online (http://www.classmates.com) and News Corp.'s Fox Sports (http://www.foxsports.com) and Fox News (http://www.foxnews.com). Other partnerships are in the works.

''There's lots of competition. We're not saying this is a slam dunk," said Rusty Williams, a Delphi manager. ''But we do have critical mass, and when it comes to starting a community, Delphi has a good lead."

IDT hasn't done much since acquiring Genie in 1996. The text-based online service is still home to a small group of die-hard fans of its discussion groups, and Genie continues to host a network of Brother word-processor users. An IDT spokeswoman said the Hackensack, N.J., company is planning to relaunch the service in the next 30 to 45 days but won't disclose details.

U S WEST Begins Free Sign-up for Advanced Web-based E-mail Service

Starting last week, millions of U S WEST customers across the company's 14-states can sign up for their own free, personalized Internet address with U S WEST.mail, a new Web-based, password-protected e-mail service that lets people send and receive e-mail from any computer with Internet access -- in homes, businesses, cybercafes, Internet kiosks and schools

-- from anywhere around the world.

In the coming year, U S WEST plans to enable and integrate the service with a range of exciting capabilities:

-- Customers get not just a Web-based address and identity, but access to a mobile, Web-based lifestyle.
-- Students and shoppers won't need to search for a computer connected to their ISP -- they can send and receive Internet messages away from home or just around the corner -- all from a single e-mailbox.
-- Travelers and businesses will be able to send and receive encrypted e-mail from anywhere in the world.
-- Customers will be able to forward and receive messages from U S WEST Advanced PCS wireless phones.
-- Address book and calendar features will give U S WEST.mail customers a 'Web-based daily planner' they can tap into from anywhere -- over any Internet-connected computer or eve their PCS phone.
-- Integrated messaging will ultimately let customers hear their e-mail and read their voice-mail.

"Today, people depend on dial tone to keep in touch. We're working to make Web tone just as fast, easy and universally available," said Sol Trujillo, president and CEO, U S WEST. "U S WEST.mail gives people access to a mobile Internet lifestyle, where their e-mail and voice-mail, their computer and wireless phones, are all increasingly connected. This is a great opportunity for customers, whether they're 'Net-savvy or 'Net-starters."

Customers who want to sign up for their own personalized, private U S WEST.mail account:

-- Can access the service online at www.uswestmail.net. It is available in both English and Spanish.
-- Customers simply provide their name, telephone number, a user name and a password to set up an account.
-- User names are provided on a first-come, first-served basis. There is no limit to the number of accounts that can be set up for any U S WEST phone number. Family members can each have their own private account.
-- Registration takes less than five minutes. Subscribers can immediately send and receive e-mail messages.

"E-mail has become a standard form of communication because it is both fast and easy to use," said Eric Bozich, vice president of Internet Services Development at U S WEST !NTERPRISE Networking. "U S WEST is providing U S WEST.mail free to all of our customers because we understand the importance of making e-mail as universally available and as easy to use as the telephone is today."

"Because we're offering free e-mail addresses on a first-come, first-served basis, we strongly encourage everyone -- especially people with common surnames -- to sign up soon to reserve their name," said Bozich. U S WEST is recommending that customers use "first name, underscore, last name" as their e-mail address (jane_doe@uswestmail.net). "Using this e-mail naming standard will make it easier for people to find you and will help people remember your e-mail address when trying to get in touch with you."

"We hope all U S WEST customers seize this opportunity to establish their own free e-mail address on the World Wide Web, regardless of whether they have Internet access at home today," said Bozich. "Most people know someone who is already online and can help them set up their U S WEST.mail account."

"U S WEST.mail can be accessed anytime, anywhere and through any Internet Service Provider connection. Customers who only have Internet access at work or school, or even at a friend's or family member's home, can set up their own private e-mail account that can be accessed from any or all of these locations."

Customers with existing Internet access will find the flexibility of U S WEST.mail appealing. For example, customers who travel frequently can check their e-mail regardless of where they are. And customers who have multiple e-mail accounts can simplify their lives by forwarding their various e-mail accounts to a single, unified U S WEST.mail account.

Businesses will appreciate that employees can use their U S WEST.mail account for personal messages instead of receiving them at company e-mail addresses, relieving businesses of the burden of processing non-business e-mail.

Each U S WEST.mail box comes with 2.5 MegaBytes of storage, which is the equivalent of about 200 printed pages of text, or as many as 500 short messages. The service supports e-mail attachments that do not exceed the maximum available memory. U S WEST.mail requires at least Netscape Navigator 4.0 or Internet Explorer 4.0, and the browser's JavaScript must be enabled. U S WEST.mail accounts are password protected, and subscribers must access their U S WEST.mail accounts at least every 30 days to keep them active.

U S WEST worked with Critical Path to develop U S WEST.mail, and Critical Path will host the service. Critical Path is a leading provider of business-to-business e-mail service solutions. "Working with Critical Path will enable U S WEST to quickly deploy additional capabilities and services that further enable us to integrate voice and data services in ways that make life better for our customers," said Bozich.

In-Store Preview Supplier Adds Streaming Preview Service for Cyber Retailers

Video Pipeline, Inc. announced today that it is now offering streaming previews to e-commerce sites. This new service will enable online sellers of movies, music and games to enhance their web sites by showing previews of their products.

With over 2,500 game previews, 7,500 movie previews and 10,000 music videos, Video Pipeline will be the largest library of video available on the internet. The spots will be available in scaling formats for connections greater than 25 kbps. The faster the connection, smoother the motion but all connections receive the same sharp images and crisp audio.

With Video Pipeline's proprietary system, consumers and retailers need no special software or player. Samples can be viewed at VIDEOPIPELINE.NET.

Retailers will be able to link to The Pipeline and "embed" the previews in their site so that customers never leave their domain. The company's database of titles and linking ID numbers will only be available for download to subscribing retailers. Because the service is priced on a per view basis, e-tailers of all sizes can take advantage of this great selling tool to attract, keep and close users.

"With more and more of our clients opening sites to sell and promote their goods, we felt that the time was right to offer the tool that has been working for their brick and mortar locations for years," said Jed Horovitz, company founder and President. "By maximizing the available bandwidth and streaming technology, it is possible for us to provide quality images and sound right now...and it will only get better. It is our job to tackle and tame the cutting edge for our clients."

New Digital Age Online Web Site Launches, Offers the First-Ever 'Jargon-Free'

Finally - a Friendly 'Web Portal' With Easy Answers! No More Slogging Through Useless Information and Confusing Terminology

Face it: When you're searching for information on the web, you want answers, not a bunch of jargon and endless, irrelevant recommendations. Until now, getting those has required the technical savvy of a programmer, the searching skills of a librarian and the patience of a priest. In other words, it has been next to impossible.

Help is on the way, with the launch today of "DigitalAgeOnline.com," a new website from the publishers of the acclaimed Digital Age Magazine. The new site is available online at http://www.DigitalAgeOnline.com.

"We created DigitalAgeOnline as a way to cut through the confusion online," said Michael Kelly, TLS Media's chairman and CEO. "Regular people have gotten lost between the 'geek-speak' of web programmers and the overkill of so-called web portals. Our site streamlines the online experience, providing help for everything from searching for web sites to learning about computers and even buying products online."

Billed as "the home page for people who weren't born yesterday," DigitalAgeOnline.com eliminates endless searching with its "EasyLinks" to pre-screened sites on topics from adventure to women's interest and countless subjects in between. It also features a search function using the popular "Ask Jeeves" utility, which lets users ask about areas of interest in plain English.

A reference center provides simple explanations for technical terms and how-to guides for common computer challenges. Viewers can even shop for computers and consumer electronics items without having to wade through the usual swamp of maddening acronyms like SDRAM, USB and DVD-ROM.

CareerPath.com Provides Job Seekers Instantaneous Resume Posting Capabilities; Resume Connection Utilizes Breakthrough Technology

CareerPath.com, the Internet's leading career management site with the largest and most current job listings database, announces breakthrough technological advancements to Resume Connection, its resume database and search service. Now job seekers can instantaneously "paste" their resumes directly onto the CareerPath.com site to be immediately searched by employers. Also, since CareerPath.com utilizes the industry's most precise resume search engine, employers can pinpoint job seekers with the exact skills and background they're looking for.

The breakthrough technology quickly converts a resume into searchable, digital information and automatically sorts and stores that information in a resume database. Employers can then take advantage of unparalleled language processing and searching software to find qualified candidates via the Web. Job seekers can be assured that their specific skills, experience and background are easily searched and found by employers across the country who rely on CareerPath.com's services.

"Providing this technology moves us far ahead of our competitors and positions us as the on-line leader in bringing employers and job seekers together," said Stephen Ste. Marie, chief executive officer of CareerPath.com. "Helping people locate new jobs quickly is the key to Resume Connection's success. Resumes are put on-line instantaneously -- and this means employers can find job seekers faster and more efficiently. And throughout the search process, the confidentiality of the information you provide is strictly guarded."

Job seekers can cut-and-paste their resumes directly onto the CareerPath.com site, where information is instantaneously placed into searchable fields. The job seeker can review and approve it in real time, then submit it to be immediately searched by employers.

The technology used by CareerPath.com to offer these enhanced resume services was developed through a partnership with Interactive Search, Inc. (I-Search), a leading provider of on-line solutions.

PC Computing Seventh Annual 'Notebook Torture Test' 'Durability Benchmark' Offers Solution to $700 Million Corporate Problem

U.S. corporations spent an estimated $700 million last year to repair and replace damaged notebook computers, an expense that's expected to rise to as much as $1 billion by next year. Add to this enormous expense other, intangible losses, like productivity declines, lost data, missed deadlines and employee frustration, and it's clear that notebook damage is a serious problem for corporate America. Yet despite the toll notebook damage takes on the company bottom line, American businesses continue to buy notebook computers in record numbers: ZD Market Intelligence estimates that U.S. notebook shipments will grow 33% in 1999 to 9.6 million, up from 7.2 million in 1998. Will today's newest crop of notebook PCs prove to be more durable investments for business "road warriors," and spend more time in the office, and less time in the shop?

Answering this question is PC Computing, the 1,000,000-circulation Ziff-Davis magazine that provides solutions for an Internet world, which has unveiled results of its 1999 notebook durability "report card," its annual "Notebook Torture Test." 1999 Notebook Torture Test results, complete with details about which notebooks survived and editors' buying recommendations, are featured in the April issue of PC Computing. The issue hits newsstands nationwide this week. Test results and details on testing protocol are also featured online at http://www.pccomputing.com.

Two notebooks shared top honors among the 22 new Pentium machines judged in the 1999 PC Computing Notebook Torture Test. Editors named the NEC Versa LX "best desktop replacement," praising its winning combination of "durability, pleasing usability, speed and battery life." And the Toshiba Portege 3015CT was editors' pick as the top "ultraportable," calling it

"the best ultraportable you'll find," and lauding its "appealing price, thin and light -- and tough, too."

PC Computing editors designed the Notebook Torture Test seven years ago to re-create the kinds of indignities that millions of business "road warriors" inflict on their notebook computers day in and day out. 64% of notebook damage is caused by drops, and 38% is caused by spills. So editors developed a Notebook Torture Test protocol that includes dropping notebooks, spilling coffee on them -- even baking and freezing them. To make this year's test even tougher, editors added a second spill -- cola -- to the other "tortures."

"The Notebook Torture Test really epitomizes PC Computing's editorial approach to delivering business technology information. We provide technology solutions, including objective measures of the productivity benefits of new technology products, so business leaders can invest in the right technology to gain competitive advantage," notes Paul Somerson, PC Computing vice president and editor-in-chief.

"Notebook damage is a huge problem for our readers, as it is for the rest of corporate America. You're out of the game if your technology out of commission," Somerson continues. "So we created the Notebook Torture Test to serve as a durability benchmark for business technology buyers to review before they invest in new notebooks for their businesses. It's the only independent, comparative test that objectively evaluates notebooks for durability, usability and performance under tough, real-world business conditions."

In the 1999 Notebook Torture Test, PC Computing editors tested 22 notebook PCs -- 18 desktop replacements and 4 ultraportables -- from leading notebook makers like Dell, Compaq, Gateway, NEC, Sony, and Micron. All were state-of-the-art machines: notebook replacements had at least 300 MHz Pentium II processors, 64 MG of memory, a 3GB hard drive, and a 13" or larger display. Ultraportables had to have a 166 MHz Pentium CPU, 32 MB of RAM, and a minimum 1GB hard drive. The big news? A record 82 percent of the portables tested survived all four "tortures," a substantial increase over last year's 56% survival rate.

Torture Test survivors, while suffering varying degrees of bumps and bruises, were all successfully booted up by PC Computing lab testers. In addition to the NEC and Toshiba PCs, other survivors of the Seventh Annual Notebook Torture Test were: the ARM ARMNote TS30i2; Brick Ergo BigScreen 4; Compaq Armada 1700; Dell Latitude CPi D300XT; Fujitsu LifeBook E350; Gateway Solo 3100LS and Solo 5150LS; Kiwi OpenNote 820; MaxTech G770; MidWEst Micro Solis ST 14-2300; NEC Versa SX; Panasonic ToughBook 71; Sony VAIO PCG-505F and VAIO PCG-818; and the Twinhead Slimnote GX. The four notebooks that bit the dust -- killed by the drop test -- were the Micron TransPort Trek; Quantex T-1310; Sceptre Soundx 6500; and the WinBook Xli 300.

This year's test results are evidence, according to editors, that today's portable computers are more rugged than ever. Not only did a record-breaking number of notebooks survive, but three notebooks emerged virtually unscathed, save for sticky keys and surfaces: the NEC Versa SX and Toshiba Portege 3015CT ultraportables; and the Panasonic ToughBook 71 desktop replacement. And for the first time since PC Computing began torturing portables, the coffee spill -- in years past the most lethal of all the tests -- failed to kill even one machine.

"Most PCs are pretty much the same these days, as manufacturers copy each

other’s designs and features, and notebook PCs are no exception, notes Somerson. "So there’s less than ever to distinguish one machine from another, except durability. And the good news for buyers is that we saw incredible durability this year, the best ever in the history of the Notebook Torture Test," Somerson observes. "This is especially impressive, considering these were not bare-bones machines -- they were tricked out with all the latest equipment any business user needs."

PC Computing delivers solutions for an Internet world. Its readers are business leaders who think strategically and are motivated by the business benefits of new technology. Written in the language of business, it empowers Business Technology Buyers with the practical information they need to make smart computer product purchases. The editorial is delivered in a style that is accessible and actionable and is focused on usability, productivity, and the application of new products to business solutions. PC Computing is the preferred information source for a paid circulation of more than 1,000,000 business technology buyers.

Pyramid Schemes in Cyberspace

It’s an age-old racket getting a second wind on the Internet.

But federal regulators warn that cyberspace versions of these so-called pyramid schemes are no better than the traditional ones. In the end, people will still end up throwing money into ventures that rarely live up to their promises of big returns.

The Federal Trade Commission along with a number of state officials announced Thursday 33 law enforcement actions against 67 defendants promoting such Internet pyramid schemes. The commission also launched a sweep of the World Wide Web to locate sites that might be hosting illegal multilevel marketing scams.

‘‘We’re committed to taking on the con artists who think they can use the Internet to promote illegal schemes," said Jodie Bernstein, director of the FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Protection.

The Internet has helped breathe new life into the schemes. A consumer merely has to type ‘‘get rich quick" into an Internet search engine and Web sites appear guaranteeing huge profits if they invest some of their money and can sign on others to do the same.

‘‘The first couple people may make money, but two or three levels down, the pyramid topples," said Holly Cherico, a spokeswoman for the Council of Better Business Bureaus in Arlington, Va.

What distinguishes pyramid schemes from legitimate multilevel marketing ventures is that they focus on recruiting new members, not on selling products, she said.

In one pyramid operation cited by the FTC, Five Star Auto Club Inc. of Poughquag, N.Y., promised online consumers an opportunity to lease their ‘‘dream vehicle" for free while earning anywhere from $180 to $80,000. All they had to do was pay an annual fee and $100 in monthly payments and recruit others to join.

But the commission alleged that those who signed up received no free lease

on a car and no earnings from the deal. The FTC has filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in White Plains, N.Y., against the Five Star Auto Club Inc. seeking a permanent injunction and consumer redress. A federal court already has temporarily shut down the operation.

‘‘Basically, these schemes take your money to pay off some other people," said Cleo Manuel, of the National Consumers League. ‘‘Ultimately, someone is going to be left holding the bag."

Manuel said con artists try to reassure consumers that the scheme is legitimate by using ‘‘shills" - decoys who are paid by the company to say they made huge profits in the scheme.

Officials warn that the Internet makes it easy for such fraudulent operations to hide, shut down or move when someone begins to catch on. Well-constructed Web sites might also give the appearance of legitimacy and be more convincing than newspaper advertisements making the same false claims.

E-mail offers an alternative way to target consumers, while making the schemes more difficult for law enforcers to trace, said Jim Lanford, co-editor of Scambusters, an online magazine about Internet fraud.

‘‘There are lots of CD-ROMs with e-mail addresses on them. Some people just go in and harvest from a news group," said Lanford. Then individuals who buy into the operation e-mail others they know - friends or family members - to let them in on their big discovery. E-mail offers the possibility for easy mass targeting, he said.

‘‘It’s the same old scheme. It’s just cheaper to do," Lanford said.

Officials say that as with anything that sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

‘‘The only people getting rich are the con artists," says Peter Hildreth, president of the North American Securities Administrators Association. ‘‘Ask yourself - if it’s such a great moneymaking idea, why is someone telling 100,000 of their closest friends about it on the Internet?"

Tips to Guard Against Pyramid Scams

The Federal Trade Commission offers these tips for consumers to guard themselves against illegal pyramid schemes:

-Avoid any plan that offers commissions for recruiting additional distributors.

-Beware of plans that ask new distributors to spend money on high-priced inventory. These plans can collapse quickly and also may be illegal pyramids in disguise.

-Be cautious of plans that claim you’ll make money through continued growth of your ‘‘downline" - the commissions on sales made by new distributors you recruit - instead of through sales you make yourself.

-Beware of ‘‘shills" - decoy references that the promoter pays to describe fictional success in earning money through the plan.

-Do your homework. Check with your local Better Business Bureau and state attorney general about any plan you’re considering, especially if the claims about your potential earnings or the product sound too good to be true.

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